Pal Guppy's murky past returns to haunt Boris

Daily Mail · 10 Apr 2017

Of all the difficulties that have enveloped Boris Johnson, none has been more damning than his association with convicted fraudster Darius Guppy, a friend since their days at Eton and Oxford.

Their alliance was most notoriously encapsulated by Johnson' s agreement to give Guppy the address of a journalist who was investigating the conman's activities, so Guppy could have him beaten up.

If, as foreign Secretary, Johnson hoped that was all behind him, he is to be disappointed.

Guppy's activities and associates are, I can disclose, to be scrutinised anew, in not one country but two, with legal proceedings in london and South africa, where Guppy, 52, now lives.

The actions are being brought by Peter Risdon, whom Guppy recruited to act as gunman in a fake gems robbery staged in a New York hotel, telling him he intended to make a modest insurance claim necessitated by an 'accounting error'.

later, though, Guppy boasted that he and co- conspirator Ben Marsh had defrauded lloyd's insurers of £ 1.8 million and stolen a similar amount from those who'd invested in their company, Inca Gemstones.

The investors' money was taken by suitcase to Switzerland and never recovered. Risdon informed the police and was chief prosecution witness at the 1993 trial when Guppy received a five-year sentence.

The half- Iranian Guppy never forgave him, recently suing him for libel in South africa, after Risdon questioned on a blog Guppy's claim to be an Iranian patriot.

'He won the libel judgment unopposed,' says Risdon, who was unable to defend the case as he was being treated for inoperable liver cancer.

Risdon says he has launched his legal response because: 'It is in the public interest: the courts shouldn't be helping a criminal exact revenge against a prosecution witness.'

There will be a re-examination of Guppy's career and friendships, not just with Johnson, but with Earl Spencer, who, Guppy believed, attempted to seduce his wife Patricia while he was in prison. and of Guppy's finances, Risdon says: 'I'll be asking his lawyer: "How do I know I will get costs from your client when he hides his money?" ' a question echoed by Guppy's former shareholders.

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